

L. C. Davis
Westfield

THE

COMMON SCHOOL JOURNAL.

VOL. VI.

BOSTON, FEBRUARY 1, 1844.

No. 3.

[THE subjoined article was communicated to Mr. Emerson, during the last year, while he was the Editor, *pro tem*, of this Journal; and the accompanying introduction and notes were prepared by him. It was excluded, however, for want of room.

The same reasons which induced Mr. Emerson to give it an insertion, are equally operative with us, viz., it is a well-written article; it is the ablest argument on that side of the question which we have seen, and it discusses a subject respecting which every school teacher and committee man,—not to say every parent,—should inform himself, in order that he may be able to act intelligently, and to give a reason for the course he pursues.

While, however, we are cordially disposed to present the article to our readers, in order to give the advocates of that side of the question a full and fair opportunity of being heard, we must avow our conviction of the unsoundness of the arguments which the writer uses to establish his opinion, and our entire dissent from the conclusion to which he comes. We believe in the expediency of giving children words before letters in teaching them *to read*, not less than in teaching them *to speak*. Some of the reasons for this opinion are set forth in a Lecture, by the Editor, delivered before the American Institute of Instruction in 1841, and printed in the first three numbers of the fourth volume of this Journal. We shall probably recur to this subject again before the close of the year, for we believe that one of the great reforms to be effected in our schools, is to consist in a change of the manner of teaching children to read.—Ed.]

We cheerfully insert the following well-written article in defence of the prevailing mode of teaching children to read, although its arguments are directly at variance with those we have always, in the Journal, been advocating. But our object is the advancement of the truth. This is best done by free and fair discussion. If the new methods are not better than the old ones, we hope they will not be adopted. If the experiment is fairly tried, and does not succeed, we shall say, without hesitation, let it be abandoned. It is only our strong conviction that the new methods are more philosophical and better, and that they will have most important effects upon the early progress, the immediate happiness, and the permanent advancement of

children, which has enlisted us among their advocates. Less than twenty years ago we held firmly all the opinions which are here advanced. Many of the arguments we have ourselves urged, we will not say as ably, but certainly as earnestly and as sincerely as the writer of this article. To quarrel with his arguments would be to quarrel with what were lately our own. To think ill of any one for holding them would be condemning ourselves. We have gradually yielded to the force of what has seemed to be the truth, and have abandoned, one after another, all our former positions and arguments. We know that many of our readers have done the same. We have no doubt that others will follow; and we should not be surprised, at any time, to find the author of this defence among the number. Meanwhile we welcome his contribution, only reserving to ourselves the right of saying, civilly, whatever we may think in regard to his positions. We regret that we have not time, at present, to give them the attention they deserve.

ED. P. T.

[For the Common School Journal.]

MR. EDITOR,—In a late number of your "Journal," is a notice of certain elementary books which have been prepared for the purpose of teaching children to read, without first making them acquainted with the names of the letters, or their various powers. This method is somewhat new among us, although we have been told that it has long been practised in other countries with great success. You are no doubt aware, sir, that, in this community at least, there are two parties on this subject; and, although the Journal, either editorially or by its contributors, has enlisted on the side of the new plan, yet knowing, as I do, that you are aiming only at improvement, I have ventured to make a few remarks in opposition to the innovation, believing, as I do most sincerely, that it is unnatural and unphilosophical, and, if it could be carried out, would in the end prove highly prejudicial to the Common Schools.

Having taught the alphabet for about twenty years, in a school where those who began generally finished their school education, I have had some opportunity of judging how the old system worked; and having taken some pains to watch the progress of the new plan, I feel called upon, as a friend of the Common Schools, to caution the public against too ready a reception of its specious promises.

Whatever may have been the *origin* of language, I think it will not be denied that it has been progressive. There must have been a time when language was not written, and could only have been taught orally. The first methods of writing it were very defective, but even these were highly important. Perhaps the first mode of expressing ideas to the eye was by the use of pictures, and while these were confined to sensible objects, there could have been little or no difficulty in reading them, unless the reader had never seen the object represented, when it would have been necessary for some person to pronounce the name, and this, of course, without spelling it, for as

yet the sounds of the human voice had not been analyzed or named. If I mistake not, this is the stage or progress to which we are now invited to return, but with this unfavorable difference, that whereas the pupils of the ancient world had a perfect clue to the name in the picture, our children have no clue in the arbitrary characters that compose the name, and cannot even *guess* what object they represent. We have long had books whose object is to amuse children by pictures of familiar objects, whose names they are called on to pronounce; and this is very well, for it is pleasing to the child and encourages him to exertion; and were it possible by such images or pictures to represent abstract ideas, or words that cannot be represented by objects, I would recommend to the friends of the new plan to throw away the alphabet, and return to the hieroglyphics at once.

But the defect of these pictures was felt by the ancients, and their first step was to use the pictures of real objects to represent abstract ideas; also, such, for instance, as the circle to represent eternity, or time without beginning or end, and a sceptre to represent power. We have the same thing in the cross and the anchor, which not only represent those sensible objects, but also Christianity and the Christian's Hope. This doubling the meaning of the image was in fact a figurative use of it, and must have increased the difficulty of reading, because the image could not be analyzed as our words can; and every secondary meaning must have been learned as the first had been. While language was in this state, the sounds of the human voice appear to have been analyzed, and the very images that were used to express the names of sensible objects and abstract ideas, were used to represent sounds;—just as if we should use any image of an object whose name begins with A to represent the sound A, or any images of objects beginning with B to represent the sound B. By this method, pictures of an Ape, a Pear, a Peach, a Lamp, and an Eagle, would spell or represent an Apple. This, if we understand the explanations of Champollion, as given in the interesting lectures of Mr. Glidden, was the state of writing amongst the Egyptians, when the greatest of their works were accomplished, and covered with hieroglyphics or pictures.

The length of time required in drawing these pictures, or even coarse outlines of them, and the necessity of learning their previous use in a figurative sense, led to another step, which we call *The Invention of Letters*, that is, the invention of an arbitrary character for each sound used in speaking. Cadmus has the credit of this invention, but all we know of it is, that, when he emigrated to Greece, he carried sixteen letters of the Greek alphabet with him. His alphabet was found to be imperfect, and other letters were afterwards added as the voice was better analyzed. It is probable that at first each character represented but one sound, and not several, as is the case with some of our letters; but we have no reason to think that the *name* of the original letters was ever the same as the *sound* of them. As civilization advanced westward, new nations were found, unpro-

vided with alphabets and a written language, and so far as they used sounds resembling those of Greece and the East, they adopted the same characters to represent them; but, unfortunately, having some sounds not provided for by the alphabet already invented, instead of inventing new letters for these particular sounds, the uncultivated nations allowed one letter to represent three, and even four sounds; and, in this way, the English, French, and other western languages were furnished with alphabets. Attempts have several times been made to reform our alphabet, so that we should have just as many letters as sounds, and it is not improbable that the next generation will see this great work accomplished; but it is not probable that the name and the sound will ever be the same, and, therefore, the objection now made by the friends of the new system of reading against the old, "that the name of the letters does not help the learner to the pronunciation of the word," will remain in full force, if it be just and true, which, however, we are by no means willing to concede.

It will be perceived that the great point gained in the invention of an alphabet consisted in the fact that, whereas before the invention it was necessary to learn as many hieroglyphics as there were words in the language, to the amount of many thousands, now it is only necessary to learn the names and powers of perhaps twenty-six letters, by the transposition of which every word can be represented. Now, if we understand the new method, it proposes to reject the use of letters and to restore the use of hieroglyphics. Lest I should seem to misrepresent this matter, I will give the words of the author of the books noticed in the Journal. "*All that is insisted on,*" says he in his preface, "*is, that the learning of the word should precede that of the letters, and for this plain reason, it is the natural order, and therefore, must be incomparably easier than the reverse.*" As to the "natural order,"* I have but few words to say, for it is evident that the author alluded to, has confounded reading with speaking. When children begin to talk, they may hear whole words and imitate them, but this manner of addressing the *ear* does not admit of comparison with that addressed to the *eye*. Different senses are addressed in very different ways. If, in learning to talk, the natural order is to pronounce whole words without regard to the letters of which they are composed; in learning to read, the natural order is to notice every sound represented by the letters, that the aggregate or combination

* The new mode of reading is properly called the "natural order," because it is obviously the very mode which every child pursues in learning to recognise every object presented to his senses. He does not begin with analyzing his mother's face, and learning the features, one by one; but he sees and recognises the face and person of his mother, as a whole, before he learns to know her or to pronounce her name. So it is with every person and object with which he forms an acquaintance. He knows them only as *whole objects*, and it is not till he has become familiar with them, that he is led to observe and name the parts of which they are composed. A child's first vocabulary consists, as all the world knows, of the names for father, mother, brother, sister, pussy, cradle, and so on. Afterwards he learns to name eyes, nose, and ears, paws and rockers, and dear, pretty, &c. *Quere*,—whether it would be an improvement on the present mode, to hold out a rattle, and, instead of saying, pretty, pretty, to say,—p, r, e, t, y,—pretty?—Ed. P. T.

may be ascertained. But to return to the alphabet. In the directions for teaching on the new plan, the child is told to fix his eyes upon the word, as a whole, until he thinks he knows it or shall know it again; he is then told that it is *man, thigh, bedstead*, or whatever it may be. Then another word is given; then others, as fast as the child can learn them. As there is a shocking want* of order in the words first proposed to be taught to the child, the first being no introduction in the sound, form, or meaning to those which follow, it is clear that the child must be taught every word in the language separately, unless the system is abandoned soon, and a knowledge of the letters acquired by the learner. It has long been the custom of skilful teachers and attentive parents to furnish their little ones with elementary books containing pictures of familiar objects, which the child was requested to name, without spelling the name annexed to the pictures, and this as a recreation, but not as a substitute for regular lessons in the alphabet and elementary sounds. If this were all that the new plan proposed, I should not be writing this essay; for any such attempt to lighten the labor of the very young pupil is as kind as it is philosophical. But the new plan forbids the use of pictures with words, though one would naturally think the teacher would be glad of their aid, and the child benefited by them; and the pupil is required to look at the word, however polysyllabic, as one character, and one only.

We have been accustomed to consider our written language as infinitely superior to that of the Chinese, but the new plan proposes to borrow the method of that curious people, much as our missionaries and learned men complain of the difficulty of learning it, for the very reason that it has no proper alphabet, and has a different character for every word. There can be no doubt that the Chinese characters were once fewer in number, and more simple in form than they are now. Indeed, it is said, that a careful analysis has reduced the complex characters to about three hundred simple ones, and the probability is, that, as new words were wanted, some simple characters were united or compounded; and the more complex the idea to be expressed, the more complex would be the character that represented it. The Chinese, however, will have one advantage over us, if our words are to be treated as characters, for their characters are more compact than ours,—such a word as *Incomprehensibility* only occupying a square of moderate size, and not like ours to be measured by inches. When the child looks at a word without knowing the separate letters, he looks at a complex character, more difficult to be recognised again than any of the Chinese, and if the plan were not early abandoned, it is difficult to see why he would not have to learn as many arbitrary characters, as if he were learning Chinese.

* There is this same "shocking want of order" in the objects a child first learns. What confusion there must be in the poor creature's thoughts, when he is one moment dwelling on the taste of milk, the next on the brightness of the fire, then on the hardness of a spoon, the sound of a rattle, the motions of a cat, the smell of a posy! Ought not this to be looked to, the nursery reformed, and things arranged in more philosophical order?—ED. P. T.

The chief reason, and almost the only one given, for the proposed retrogression to barbarism, is the fact that the *name* of a letter is not always indicative of its *sound*. This objection strikes at the root of *spelling*, of course, and, in estimating the advantage gained in reading a little earlier or a little easier, it will be prudent to consider the disadvantage of not learning early to spell. But is this objection a sound one?—is it founded in reason and in truth? I think not in either. Few children are so simple as this objection supposes them to be, and I have rarely met with any so dull as not to perceive the difference between the name and the power of a letter, after very little practice. I have seen some attempts to substitute other names for the letters, as nearly as possible resembling their sounds, and it has seemed to me that the same pains expended in teaching the child the names and the sounds in the old way, would have been at least as successful. But I would not discourage any attempt of this sort, for, should it find favor, it would remove the objection to spelling and to preliminary instruction in the alphabet. Is it true, however, that the names of our letters are no help to the pronunciation of words? It does not require much courage to deny the position, and I think it will not be difficult to show that the evil has been greatly overrated. I know not the proportion between the use of the long sound of the vowels and their short one, but I think it will be conceded that the name and the sound of the long vowels, *a, e, i, o, u, y*, are as much alike as could be wished, and as they occur in more than ten thousand syllables of our language, and guide the ear and the tongue of the child, in spite of the surrounding consonants, it will hardly do to say, as the friends of the new system do, that the names of letters are *no* guide. The short sound of the vowels also is so uniformly the same, and so easily learned, that we must be careful not to overrate the tendency of the name to obstruct the progress of the child. It is very easy to sneer at what are called the *abs* and the unmeaning elementary sounds, but it seems to me that some true philosopher, seeing, as he must have done, the impossibility of naming the consonants, without the aid of the vowels, found in the *abs* a remedy for this defect; and I mistake if these very despised *abs* should not be considered, as compound characters, the best possible names of almost every consonant in almost every form of combination. What more natural than to unite the various consonants with the long and short sounds of the vowels, and what more philosophical, since it is so difficult to name the consonants separately, than to do, as was once done in all the primary schools of France, call *ba, be, bi, &c.*, names of sounds, long ones, to be pronounced as one letter, and *ab, eb, ib, &c.*, names of short sounds, which the child would meet at every step? * It does seem to me that the rejection of these *compound letters*, because they are not “words expressing ideas,” is as unphilosophical as would be the denouncing of straight marks and other elementary strokes in a system of penmanship, be-

* Would it not be better to teach the same sounds by significant words, so that the child should have something to think of, while he is learning?—ED. P. T.

cause the parts of letters are not whole letters or whole words. If I have room, I shall touch again upon the comparison between reading and writing, and ask how little children are to be taught to use their slates, since they must not write letters for fear of learning them, and cannot *write* whole words at a blow as, it is said, they *pronounce* them. It is very common for those who would discourage the learning of the letters and elementary sounds, to thrust forward the irregular words *plough, rough, thought, cough*, and such like, to show the absurdities of pretending to spell by using the letters; but is it fair to produce such extreme examples? Is it even fair to produce exceptions, when they are, compared with regular words, hardly as one to a thousand? * Any careful classification of the words of our language must demonstrate the fact that the anomalies are few; and the *abs*, destitute of meaning as they may be, are full of power, and a key to the pronunciation and orthography of innumerable syllables in the language. Let us concede that there are some and perhaps many irregularities of orthography in our language, but let us not, to support a questionable novelty, forget that these irregularities are few compared with the whole number of words; and the worst of them, when ranged in one column, can very easily be mastered by a child of common capacity. I think I may appeal to every experienced teacher when I assert that very irregular words are often as easily learned as those which present no difficulty, and such words as *catarrh* and *phthisic* are the first to be mastered and remembered forever. †

It would be difficult to say, moreover, why it is any more unphilosophical to teach the names of letters, which bear no resemblance to the sounds, than to teach words which are names of things to which they bear no resemblance. How does a child know that *horse* is the name of a certain animal, till he is told so? and how many times must he be told so before he will associate the idea of the animal with the name? I see no difference in kind, between this process and that of learning the names and sounds of letters. ‡ The fact is, letters are but tools, and all tools must have names. No name of any other tool that I have seen indicates its use, and yet a name is convenient, and will never lead any mechanic into the error of attempting to saw with a hammer. ‡

I know of no notion more unsafe than that one, in teaching a language, a science, or anything else, should propose to pass over the elements of the knowledge to be acquired; and why this process should be applicable to reading more than to any

* In regard to this, we think our correspondent to be in a great error. The exceptions exceed the rule, immensely.—Ed.

† Would it not be much better that these hard words should be learnt first in sentences, so that they should be remembered forever as meaning something, instead of remaining in the memory as mere strange, unmeaning combinations of letters not to be used for years?—Ed. P. T.

‡ Would it be an improvement upon the common mode of learning the names, together with the uses and nature of animals, to confine a score of different ones in a pen and set a child to learn the *names* of all of them first of all? Or would it be wise in a carpenter to set his apprentice, first of all, to learn the *names* of all the tools in the chest?—Ed. P. T.

other art, I cannot perceive. Indeed, if this process of teaching be true of one branch of knowledge, it must be true of all, and let us see how its application will strike us. Perhaps no branch of instruction so nearly resembles reading as music does. It has its letters called breves, semi-breves, minims, crotchets, quavers, &c., or, do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si,—the name giving no indication of the sound, which depends upon various contingences. Shall we say to the child, "It is unnecessary to learn to read the notes; you can learn to sing in half the time, by looking at them in groups, and hearing somebody sound them? There is no meaning, no expression in a single note, but you will be interested in the whole tune. Catch the air then by the ear, and pay no regard to the notes of which it is composed, whether they are separate, like letters, or tied together like diphthongs or syllables." If we understand anything of the movement now going on in the musical world, this would be the very method of all others that would be discountenanced; and singing by the ear, though a more expeditious mode of *appearing* to know something, would be the most effectual way to prevent the pupils ever attaining to anything like correct and thorough instruction in the science.*

Again, the characters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0, have names, which give little or no idea of their power or meaning, for these depend, as do those of musical characters, upon the *place* and arrangement. Shall we, therefore, say to the child, "These characters have names, but as the name does not determine whether they represent units, or tens, or hundreds, or thousands, and as they are mere abstractions until applied, it is of no use to learn the names of the individual figures; you will learn numeration much faster by reading whole sums without regard to the separate characters of which they are composed." The child, therefore, when shown the sum 926,000, for instance, must be told to call it nine hundred and twenty-six thousand; and when shown the sum, 926, must be taught to call it nine hundred and twenty-six, and must wait for an explanation of the power of the separate digits till he has acquired a facility in reading large numbers. In this case, as in that of music, the progress may appear to be more rapid, and it may be more agreeable to the pupil; and this, we are told, is a good and sufficient reason for skipping the elements, to which, it is confessed, the child must return at last.†

* In order that the analogy should hold, letters should be written on something like a musical scale, so that we should be able to judge which sound of *a*, for example, was to be given, by observing what place it had in the gamut; and we should be able to prefix to a paragraph or to a chapter, a character corresponding to a flat, informing us that wherever *a* should occur in that chapter it must be sounded flat.—ED. P. T.

† This is a most unlucky comparison for the writer's argument. The characters 1, 2, 3, &c. have names which give us a *most precise* idea of their meaning. The character 2, always means *two*, precisely *two* tens, or *two* hundreds, or *two* thousands, &c.,—the tens, hundreds, or thousands, are signified by its *place*; but it never means more or less than *two*. Again; whenever the character 2 occurs, we give its name, (except in 12 and 20, which are contracted words,) and stop not to spell it. Again; the greatest step in teaching numbers that has ever been made, was that made by Pestalozzi, and introduced among us by Colburn, which consists

I will illustrate the new method by one more application. In teaching English Grammar to children, the chief obstacle is the complex system of modes and tenses. Other languages have numerous modes and tenses, which depend upon a modification of the terminations of one word, called a verb. Thus, *amo* means I love; *amabam*, I loved; * *amavi*, I have loved; *amaveram*, I had loved; *amabo*, I shall love; *amavero*, I shall have loved, &c. &c. It so happens that, in English, we can make no approach to this change of termination, having but one for each verb, as, love, loved; consider, considered. Thus, the early English grammarians very naturally taught their pupils that, in English, there were but two tenses, the present, *love*, and the past, *loved*; and they resolved the phrases which correspond to the six Latin tenses into their elements, I love, I loved, I have loved (*participle*), I had (*past*) loved (*participle*), I shall (*present*) love (*infinitive*), I shall (*present*) have (*infinitive*) loved (*participle*). About forty years ago, an amiable innovator appeared, named Lindley Murray, who taught that, as it was difficult always to resolve such phrases into their elements, it was much better to call a whole phrase a single tense at once, and children would advance much faster, and much time would be saved; it being so much easier to say, "*I shall have loved* is the future tense," than to say, "*I shall* is the present tense of the verb *shall*, *have* is the infinitive of the verb *have*, and *loved* the participle of the verb *love*,—*have* depending on *shall*, and *loved* qualifying whatever thing I shall have." The new plan succeeded, the old one was discarded, and our children are now taught that, in English, there are two voices, five modes, four participles, and above forty tenses, when the fact is, that we have no voices, no modes, two participles, and only two tenses; and, after forty years' wandering in this wilderness, we have hardly yet begun to set our faces towards the Land of Promise,—the simple system from which our fathers so unwisely departed. The very proposal, therefore, to slight the elements of any art or science, should be viewed with distrust; for we may be sure that the instruction must be less thorough without this natural basis, and that the time said to be saved will be required with usury, when the defective instruction is to be repaired.

We are not without an example of this sort of instruction, and many of us who are by no means old, have lived long enough to see an experiment on this very plan begun and ended. It is hardly a quarter of a century since a Frenchman,

in making a learner familiar with the powers of numbers, in all their usual combinations, before he is taught any of the characters which represent them.—ED. P. T.

* We notice, in this place, though somewhat foreign to our present purpose, that the most important blunder that Lindley Murray ever made,—and that's a strong expression,—is supposing that *amabam* means *I loved*. It never has that meaning unless when *I loved* means *I was in the habit of loving*. Its proper meaning, nearly always, is *I was loving*. This blunder led Lindley Murray to give the name *imperfect* to the only tense in the language which *never* is imperfect. If the reader desires to get an idea of the other blunders of this "amiable innovator," we would refer him to a grammar, full of good sense and philosophical views of the language, which appeared some years ago, written by William B. Fowle, at that time one of our most successful teachers.—ED. P. T.

named Hamilton,* proposed to the citizens of Boston to teach French in a few lessons; and then, as now, crowds flocked to the new railroad to knowledge. He used no grammar, but commenced with reading the New Testament, the pupils pronouncing whole words after him. The progress, at first, was rapid; the pupils were encouraged, the teacher was well paid. It was not long, however, before the pupils discovered that they lost about as fast as they acquired; that what they learned, having no basis, was of no use; and that the only course was to take the grammar, and learn the letters, the elements of pronunciation, the structure of the language, as their fathers had done before them. In a year or two, the new plan was forgotten in Boston; the teacher paid his board with a barrel or two of his books, his whole stock in trade, and died with his system, alike poor and disregarded. The writer of this was one of his pupils, and purchased the books that had been pledged to the landlady, and only regrets that they are not in English to meet the present demand.

But I must pass to other considerations. We are told, then, by the friends of the new system, that teaching the alphabet consumes too much time, and is an irksome task to children. We doubt whether these are ever good reasons for omitting to teach children anything they ought to learn. It often takes a good while to teach a child obedience, and the lessons are often irksome and painful; but shall they be slighted on this account? It seems to me, however, that the time consumed in learning the letters is over-stated, and the pain inflicted altogether a mistake. Most children learn the alphabet in infancy, at home; and both they and their parents find a pleasure in the exercise. Many intelligent parents have assured me that they have taught the alphabet to their children in three days. My pupils have sometimes required as many months; but then it must be recollected that, in Common Schools, an abecedarian may think himself fortunate if five minutes a day are devoted to him. As there are seventy-eight working days in three months, the child, at this rate, receives six hours and a half of instruction; and, allowing him ten minutes a day, he will receive but thirteen hours' instruction in a quarter, or one hour a week. This is not an alarming amount of time; the greater concern should be about the employment of the rest of the quarter, when the child is not engaged upon the alphabet. Then, as to the irksomeness of the lessons, this depends greatly upon the manner in which the letters are taught. If the letters are pointed at with a pin, and nothing is said or done to fix the attention of the child upon them, he may well complain; but, if he is required to make the letters,—and any child can do this; if he is asked what they look like, that he may associate ideas with them; if he is told what they stand for, or associates them with some amusing rhyme;

* We were never converts to Hamilton's plan of teaching, in the unqualified way in which he presented it. Yet there were some admirable things in it, and we have long been inclined to believe that the greatest improvements to be made in teaching languages will come from moving in the direction in which he pointed.

—my word for it, he will never take so much delight in any future lesson, as in achieving this first victory over written language. Almost any child can make a letter five hundred times every day on a slate or blackboard, and call it by name as many times. Next day he can make A and B, and name them repeatedly. Then A, B, C, and so on, adding one letter a day. If there is not excitement enough in this process, he may be taught to use such letters as he has learned, in forming easy words. Thus, of the first eight, he may form B E D, B A D, B A G, C A B, A C E, A G E, H A G, H A D, H E A D, F A C E, &c., which the teacher may make, one at a time, on the slate, and leave him to imitate and sound as many times as he pleases. He may teach the child, what probably was his own first lesson, that “A was an Archer, who shot at a Frog,” and “B was a Butcher, who kept a great Dog.” Or, he may resort to the New England Primer of our ancestors, and teach the child that “In *Adam's* fall we sinned all;” “Thy life to mend, this *Book* attend;” “The *Cat* doth play, and, after, slay.” Or, he may describe the letters as we are told Will Shakspeare’s mother described them to him: “First there is A, that ever standeth a-straddle; next him is B, who is all head and body, and no legs; then cometh C, who bulgeth out behind like a very hunchback; and after him cometh D, who doeth the clean contrary, for his bigness is all before.” In these, and many other ways, the alphabet may be made a very interesting lesson to very young pupils.

A child who knows his letters and abs, can generally take easy reading-lessons, and “guess and spell out,” as Dr. Watts says, half the words, without the aid of a teacher; but not so the learner by wholesale, for he cannot advance a step without the aid of his teacher, no one word that he has learned being any key to the meaning or pronunciation of the next, especially if he uses the ‘Little Primer’ or ‘The First Book’ so highly commended in the Journal; for, although the alphabet is there omitted because it affords no key to correct pronunciation, the words are so classed or arranged as most effectually to preclude the idea of their being any key to what follows them. The first three words to be learned are *man, boy, girl*, which have no letter or sound in common; the three next are *head, eye, nose*; the three next, *jump, quick, lazy*, and so on. If we must teach on this new plan, it is to be hoped that some one will prepare a book which shall introduce the sounds in some order, and make the first lessons as good an introduction, as the nature of the case admits, to the lessons that are to follow. The friends of the new system have many sneers at the nonsense columns of the spelling-books; but in what those columns differ from the columns in the books commended by the Journal, I cannot perceive. More than half the pages of ‘My First School Book,’ and the whole of ‘My Little Primer,’ consist of columns of words separated from other words, as in spelling-books, and only differing in their greater confusion. In common spelling-books, the reading-lessons sometimes include the words that have been previously spelled and pronounced; but

the author of 'My First School Book,' in the preface of his book, after saying that "Spelling, as commonly practised in schools, is of *no assistance whatever*, in the way of pronunciation," remarks that, "As comparatively but few of the words contained in the columns, (fifty-five pages of them,) are to be found incorporated in the succeeding part of the book, (i. e. the reading-lessons,) it is desirable that this latter part should be used for *spelling*, as well as for reading exercises"! How the child is to *spell*, we are told in another part of the preface: "It is recommended to all who have not yet tried the system, that the scholar's attention be at first exclusively directed to the whole words. He may even go through the book, the first time, entirely in this way; in which case, no fear need be entertained that he will not know the alphabet in season. It may be well, however, in the way of variety, occasionally to select a short word from a lesson, and teach him to read its letters." If I intended this essay for a review of the books in question,—and they are almost identified with the system,—I should select the paragraphs quoted from the preface of the author, as my text; for they are remarkable in many respects. We are told to avoid the alphabet, because it is a hindrance, and because it is irksome and painful to the child to learn it; and then we are told that, "by way of variety,"—that is, to please the child, who has become tired of the new way,—"it may be well to select a short word, and teach him to read its letters!" The whole quotation implies that it is impossible to teach whole words without also teaching the letters; and the author adds, "Teachers will find that, with hardly any direct effort on their part, the knowledge of the letters will come." In the first treatise on human physiology that we write, we shall direct the parent to teach her infant to run at once,* and not to crawl or walk, which are irksome and tardy methods of going ahead; for "*parents* will find that, with hardly any direct effort on their part, the knowledge of *creeping* and *walking* will come."

When I have urged my objections against the new method, I have uniformly been met with the remark, that the best proof that the system was what it pretends to be, is the success that has attended the experiment. Success is assuredly pretty good evidence that the means are suitable, but I do not think it is certain that any success has crowned the experiment, nor, in fact, that the experiment has been or can be tried. Let us see. The object is, to teach children to read without previously learning the letters, or pronouncing them or the syllables. Children may have learned a few words in this way, but I have been assured by teachers that the progress is slow and unsatisfactory, until, as the preface has it, "with hardly any *direct* effort on the part of the teacher," but with constant effort on the part of the poor child, the original error is repaired, and "the knowledge of the letters has come." This

* Children usually learn to "run at once," of themselves. A close observer, Dr. Paley, says, "Nor is it (the child) less pleased with its first successful endeavors to walk, or rather to run, which precedes walking."—ED. P. T.

belief that the advocates of this new plan are deceived as to the extent of the aid afforded by pronouncing a few words before teaching the letters, and my conviction that ere long the teachers would honestly say so, has prevented me, and others, hitherto, from making any attempt to defend the old plan. We believe,—and we should rest quiet in the belief, were not experiments in education more important than those in any other department of human concerns,—we believe that the new plan is a mistake, engendered no doubt by the purest benevolence, and the sincerest concern for the welfare of our race, but still a mistake that will soon pass away. Q.

[From the Newburyport Herald.]

LETTERS TO A PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER.

No. V.

My ———. In the arrangement of your school, next in rank above those promising little gentlemen whom you are to teach the A B C, and to whom I devoted my last letter, comes, I suppose, another class, an inch taller, unto whom you are to explain the wonders of *word-making*. There is an old bridge from the alphabet to words, which I am strongly inclined to deem altogether unnecessary,—I mean that, composed of meaningless syllables,—a-b, ab,—and the rest of the family. These are, I imagine, as useless as they certainly are uninteresting and tedious to children, who can, without difficulty, if you will take them kindly by the hand, step from letters to words,—to such at least as are familiar to their ears. If this be practicable, pray try it; for there are few things more sadly ludicrous than a row of juveniles drawling out syllabic sounds utterly destitute of sense. The better way to proceed, I venture to suggest, in opposition to past customs,—stereotyped methods, and at the imminent risk of being thought an innovator and revolutionist, a radical and an ultraist,—is this: “My little boys, stand up and look at me. I am going to show you how to make a word, so that when you see it in a book, you may know it and what it means. I am going to print a word, such as you very often speak. What shall it be? Let me see. Suppose we take the word *cap*. You all know what a cap is, for you all have caps to cover your heads when you are out of doors. Now see how I make the word *cap* on the blackboard. First I make a C, then an A next to it, then a P next to the A. There you have it,—C-A-P,—CAP. Now look at it a minute. Be sure you see the whole of it. Now you may try to make that word yourselves, on your slates or on the blackboard.” Thus would I do with all words of one syllable which stand for or are the names of objects familiar to children, beginning with the names of the objects in the schoolroom. Then I would take the same course with words of the like character of two syllables, dividing the syllables first, and then putting or pushing them together;

as, for instance, *apple*,—AP-PLE,—APPLE. The like process may be adopted with polysyllables. Having taught and talked about, in a pleasant way, a respectable list of nouns, I would treat after a similar fashion other simple terms,—directing the attention of the pupils to some sentences they were in the habit of using, in which such terms occur, so they might understand that I was *printing* what they were accustomed to *say*. With the elements thus prepared and made familiar to the eye, I would take another step, and manufacture little phrases and sentences, such as “My Cap,” “My Book,” “Let me see your knife,” “Lend me your slate,” &c. &c. &c. These sentences should be such as the boys are speaking constantly; they should see their *talk* printed,—expressed by signs instead of sounds. I suppose you understand this method at a glance. But I think I hear you say, “This will take a great deal of time, and we shall move very slowly.” You are mistaken. At first the process will seem a slow one, but you will soon find that you will move all the quicker by-and-by,—just as a locomotive appears to work hard to get started, but keeps moving faster and faster, until it rushes off like an arrow from the bow. You will discover, before a great while, that you have been teaching reading, and natural reading too, as well as spelling and word-making. Every step has been understood; and so when once learned, learned once for all. Bad spelling and vicious reading come, at least most of them, from children’s blundering over what they do not understand, and blundering because they do not understand it, in the primary schools. Observe, I say primary schools. I am no convert to the doctrine that boys, until they get to be *men*, are to have everything explained to them, and be saved the trouble of hard study and hard thinking. But in teaching the elements,—in educating the eye and the voice in order to have sentences said or read correctly, they must be intelligible to the sayer and reader, so that his mind shall unconsciously modulate and tune his vocal organs. Dr. Beecher once remarked, that “you never heard the worst reader or speaker cry *fire* in a wrong tone when his *own house* was on fire.” You can see the pith of this pithy observation, and apply it. If Mrs. Siddons did call for beer, like Lady Macbeth, it was because she was, by nature and not art, a tragic actress. By hinting at these anecdotes, I have indirectly said all I could say, were I to write pages on the way to teach *reading aloud*,—for that is the kind of reading you are to teach in school. This fact, by the way, seems to be forgotten by those who argue that it is a good plan to have books contain matter somewhat above the comprehension of children, so that by searching and thinking they may find out its meaning. No one, child or man, can read a sentence correctly *aloud*, the meaning of which he does not understand. I take that to be a self-evident truth; unless, to use a sort of Hibernianism, the reader happens to go right by mistake. Conduct your exercises in reading and spelling conformably to this truth. Do not weary your boys by trying to teach them what must be to them an unknown tongue. In after-life many a public speaker has

found his hardest work to be, to get rid of bad habits as a reader, fastened upon him,—stuck in his throat as it were,—in a dame's school, where he was subjected to the abomination of spelling *a-bom-i-na-tion* before he knew what an abomination was, and to other evils of a like character. Steadily and perseveringly, I advise you to pursue a more natural course than has been commonly done. Teach your pupils to read with the soul, as well as with the vocal organs; and although you may give their parents no opportunity to boast that they can drawl in the Testament, you may give yourself and visitors the pleasure of hearing them read naturally, distinctly, and with correct expression in the "Rollo Books," or even in stories more simple than are to be found in those favorites of the young. UTOPIA.

[We readily admit the communication of our correspondent C. If he has found a stove by which the pure external air can be introduced into the schoolroom, be warmed without being burned, and by which so equable a heat can be diffused throughout the apartment that it will not have the temperature of the five zones within the space of five steps, then it is an improvement which we shall be glad to encourage.—ED.]

[For the Common School Journal.]

J. MEARS' IMPROVED ARNOTT COAL-STOVE,

For warming and ventilating schoolrooms, halls, and other apartments

MR. EDITOR,—With the multiplicity of newly-invented or newly-improved stoves before us, it is really difficult to decide upon their respective merits, or to advise the public in the premises. There are so many unimportant modifications; so great a variety of shape, connected with the same principle; and such a mixture of principle without system, in the construction of stoves, that the purchaser is at a loss to make a selection; and, unless he is acquainted with the philosophy of heat and ventilation, he is as liable to select the most exceptionable as the most perfect.

We are induced to ask the attention of the public to this important subject for two reasons.

1st. The stoves generally in use, in our schoolhouses, are objectionable in many respects, and are causes of evils which ought to be removed; and,

2d. It appears to us that Mr. Mears has succeeded better than any other man in constructing a stove which provides for proper ventilation, and at the same time radiates a pleasant heat.

It has been considered a matter of no consequence whatever how the fire was placed in the room, or how the smoke was carried off, provided the fire was there, and *the smoke* was not there. A *red-hot* stove, radiating heat to those who are seated near it, sufficient to roast them alive, or a huge fabric incapable of radiating heat in any degree, have been equally in favor.

Children have either been burned or suffocated by heat, or subjected to suffering from the cold, in the same room. In fact, their real comforts are seldom secured, and at the same time the instructor is authorized to use the rod upon the backs of all delinquents, whether they are in a condition to learn their lessons or not.

So far as we are able to judge, Mr. Mears has succeeded admirably in producing a stove which at once obviates all these evils. It radiates a pleasant and equal heat throughout a large room, without subjecting the inmates to either extreme,—that of too much heat, or of too much cold. It is simple and easily regulated, is afforded at a low price, consumes but little fuel, and, what is very important, it introduces into the room the external air, and provides for a constant circulation of it through its chambers, so that the utmost economy prevails in the whole arrangement.

The principle upon which this stove is constructed appears to be strictly philosophical. Its make is durable and its appearance ornamental.

We have not room to enter into a minute detail of the parts of this stove; and if we had, the ideas conveyed would not be half so important to the reader as an actual inspection of the stove itself. It is manufactured and for sale by Messrs. Prouty & Co., North Market street; and we advise all who are about purchasing, either for parlors or public buildings, to call and examine for themselves. C.

“To love each other, I think we chiefly need but to know each other. Ignorance breeds suspicion; suspicion, dislike or hatred; and so we live as strangers and enemies, when knowledge would have led to intimacy and friendship.”

NEW SCHOOL BOOKS.

HUMAN ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY. For the use of Schools. By J. F. W. Lane, M. D. Translator of Milne Edwards' Outlines of Anatomy and Physiology. pp. 223. Boston. Wm. B. Fowle and Nahum Capen. 1844.

RUDIMENTS OF NATURAL PHILOSOPHY AND ASTRONOMY; designed for the younger classes in Academies, and for Common Schools. With numerous engravings, illustrative of philosophical experiments. By Denison Olmstead, professor of Natural Philosophy and Astronomy in Yale College. pp. 292. New Haven. S. Babcock. 1844.

AN ELEMENTARY TREATISE ON THE STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONS OF THE NATIONAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS OF THE UNITED STATES. Designed for the use of Schools and Academies, and for general Readers. By Charles Mason, A. M., Counsellor at Law. Second edition. Boston. James Munroe & Co.

[THE COMMON SCHOOL JOURNAL; published semi-monthly, by WILLIAM B. FOWLE AND N. CAPEN, No. 184 Washington Street, (corner of Franklin Street,) Boston. HORACE MANN, Editor. Price, One Dollar a year.]